

## 2007 Harrisburg St. Patrick's Day Parade "A View from the End"



It was another successful St. Patrick's Day parade for Harrisburg. This thing keeps getting bigger every year! I chose a view from the end of the parade where I could hide more and also take some pictures. I hate crowds anyway. This year it was much more crowded than last year. But that could be because it was also about 20 degrees warmer! Trying to weave your way down to the judge's area is usually an interesting mix

of older people, middle-aged people, college kids, drunks, the happy, the sad, vendors and vagabonds. Typical for any parade I would assume. I did not try that this year, but can report that it was that way last year, when it was less crowded over all. So this year had to be bad. There are several nice bars downtown right along the parade route, which are usually hopping. Some are Irish-themed. I stayed away, and hugged a pole, which helped me steady my camera.

I had my friend, raised in the Cincinnati area, with me. She always gives me an interesting perspective on how things are different here than in Ohio. She was intrigued by several things. Surprising to her was the actual size of the parade. She claims Cincinnati (Cincy) has no such enthusiasm for St. Patrick's Day parades, to her knowledge. As well she was turned off by the pitiful lag between parade participants. She recalls no parade she has been to being that bad. I do remember last year thinking the darn thing was over, due to a lag, and it was only half way through! She enjoyed the "overnight entrepreneur" vendors selling Philadelphia style soft pretzels and water, off of a piece of cardboard on top of a garbage can filled with water bottles, all in a grocery cart. The pretzels looked tasty, but I am always wondering about the cleanliness of the food, or vendors. So I never get one. My Cincy friend was intrigued. I'll bet if a person dressed in a suit and had a little fancier food carrying device, they would double their sales. Although the guys I saw seemed to be having no trouble! It's kind of a "get into the spirit" thing, which increases sales. People get hungry when they get excited. This area is rich in Irish heritage, with a long history of early Irish immigrants, and so there is a little more Irish enthusiasm here than in many areas.

We had our share of excitement before the parade. We went looking for a restroom in the buildings behind the Capitol, where the parade participants assemble. A building that I had been familiar with was closed this year and a hand-written sign said to use the bathrooms in the Forum and State Library building. We walked there and upon seeing the women's restroom completely packed, noticed a permanent sign near the elevator stating restrooms were also on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> floors. Several other people ahead of us were proceeding into an elevator, most likely in search of the upper restrooms. We decided we would take a similar pursuit and proceeded to the 5<sup>th</sup> floor. There it was surprisingly deserted. Upon exiting the elevator, after taking it back down, a guard

quickly approached us with great chastisement about our choice of restrooms. I tried to explain the lack of any sign saying you couldn't use the upper floors as well as the sign outside simply stating to use the "restrooms at the Forum", which to me means any restroom. He responded that it really meant that you could only use the ones on the first floor! But we quickly apologized, and got out (with him still talking), after remembering that I was carrying a camera and we both had cell phones with cameras. You never know what a guard might be thinking in this age of paranoia.

We thoroughly enjoyed looking at the neat architecture of the old buildings downtown, as well as watching the interesting mix of people, in and out of the parade. We saw a Ben Franklin look alike suddenly open his sash and peer out from atop the crowd, partiers wondering in an out of the Firehouse restaurant like a cuckoo clock, and an Irish Ozzy Osborne look alike in the parade! There were a couple of nuns a few yards from us on apparent convent steps. They danced to, and completely enjoyed, the Notre Dame fight song. There were more bagpipers this year than normal, and I think another Irish dance group that I had not seen before. These groups are what make the parade Irish. As is typical, there were the displays that seemed not to fit in there, or in any parade. Some appeared to be a random group that really had little purpose or were not even lined up in any fashion. There is always that odd group of people in a "hay wagon" which don't seem to add any enthusiasm to the crowd. People, make a nice Irish float of some sort at least! The crowd was clapping a lot for the most part. I saw a few school bands that I had not seen before. A middle school from Elizabethtown had a particularly large band, which impressed me, since it is extremely hard to find kids willing to participate in band (too geeky I guess). An Elvis impersonator was there, as he normally is. He has a great voice for real and sounds and laughs like Elvis. My Cincy friend was impressed. Although she pointed out that he looked nothing like Elvis and it was rather silly how females were actually running out to hug him, as if he WAS Elvis. He was a big cause of a lot of lag time in the parade actually. There was a very impressive bunch of young kids on tall and short unicycles, which was unique. There was some sort of fire or river-rescue emergency that occurred just minutes before the parade started. Some river rescue trucks stormed down the parade route, with sirens on, and a medical helicopter took off from Harrisburg Hospital (or near there). Overall there really were not many fire trucks in the parade. Maybe they left for the emergency? I had seen more in other years.

Overall, it was your average parade. Not real good, not real bad. The entertainment was fine, but there was a real lack of Irish-themed "floats". It was a decent afternoon anyway, at least from our view from the end. It all started on time and was done in about 2 hours (almost too long for me and my friend). But we had fun and got to do one of the things we enjoy, people watch. A parade is always good for that!